

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 27, 2014

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

In light of the Russian Federation's illegal invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, we ask for your leadership in re-imposing sanctions on Rosoboronexport, Russia's official state arms exporter, and fully severing the U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) business relationship with this unsavory agency. Since 2011, DoD has awarded Rosoboronexport more than \$1 billion in no-bid contracts for the procurement of Mi-17 helicopters. Prior to that, this agency had rightly been under U.S. sanctions for several years.

Until the invasion of Ukraine, our central concern regarding Rosoboronexport had been its ongoing role as the chief supplier of arms to Bashar al-Assad, whose regime is using these very weapons to murder innocent Syrian civilians, as confirmed by DoD. We remain deeply troubled that DoD is sending huge cash payments to an agency that continues to enable mass murder.

However, Russia's recent actions in Ukraine give us a broader reason to put an end to DoD's misguided business dealings with Rosoboronexport and sanction this agency. Rosoboronexport is an arm of the Russian government and a powerful instrument of Vladimir Putin's increasingly belligerent foreign policy, and it handles more than 80% of Russia's weapons exports. By obstructing the business of Rosoboronexport and limiting the income it provides to corrupt Russian officials, we would increase the costs of Putin's aggression.

Those costs must be real. To that end, we call on you to cancel all existing DoD contracts with Rosoboronexport, as well as any plans for future deals, and impose sanctions to ban contracts with any company that cooperates with Rosoboronexport on military programs. Doing so would require our foreign partners to make a choice between America and Putin. These were the very objectives of an amendment we authored or otherwise supported during this week's Senate consideration of the Ukraine aid bill. Unfortunately, that amendment has not been considered. These steps would also help implement sanctions you authorized on March 17, which included penalties against persons who "operate in the arms or related materiel sector in the Russian Federation."

Regarding DoD's Mi-17 program, Russia's aggression in Ukraine highlights the dangers of relying too heavily on Russia for the future capacity of the Afghan military, and DoD's blindness to these risks has been deeply troubling. Indeed, DoD's procurement of 63 Mi-17 helicopters from Rosoboronexport has created strategic vulnerabilities that could have serious implications for our own national security, should the Afghan military not reach its intended capacity.

On August 5, 2013, a number of us raised these issues regarding overreliance on Russia in a letter to DoD. We specifically asked: "Does the overreliance on Russia fostered by this Mi-17 program put the U.S. at risk of Russian coercion or blackmail on other security issues, such as the crisis in Syria, Iran's drive to obtain nuclear weapons, U.S. missile defense, arms control negotiations, or the security of former Soviet republics?" In a reply letter from the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, these and other concerns were ignored. In addition, DoD recently indicated that it has contemplated further business dealings with Rosoboronexport in the areas of Mi-17 sustainment and machine-gun procurement. We ask you to end any such plans.

DoD's failure to consider the strategic implications of sourcing mission-critical military equipment from a hostile power such as Russia is surprising. This problem was self-inflicted, but it is not too late to address it. Rosoboronexport has yet to deliver two dozen Mi-17s that are already on contract for the Afghans, which presents an opportunity to cancel those deliveries and mitigate the risks by transitioning the Afghans away from a pure Russian fleet and incorporating U.S.-made platforms. This is consistent with unclassified recommendations made by DoD's own rotary wing aviation experts in a study conducted three years ago.

Sanctioning Rosoboronexport would send a powerful message to Putin, and we urge you to give serious consideration to these requests. The outcome in Ukraine is critically important both to American credibility and to the future of the international order, and our actions should reflect that.

Sincerely,

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